

Squaw Creek Canyon Wilderness Study Area

1. The Study Area -- 10,780 acres

The Squaw Creek Canyon WSA (ID-16-42) is located in Owyhee County, 95 miles southwest of Boise, Idaho. The WSA includes 10,780 acres of BLM lands with no nonfederal inholdings (see Table 1).

Eighty-eight percent of the WSA's 23-mile circumference is bounded by primitive dirt roads separating it from other BLM-administered lands including WSAs ID-16-41 and ID-16-45 to the west and south. The remainder of the WSA's boundaries are formed by three miles of state land on the south and northwest and .75 miles of private land on the northwest. Three short cherry-stem roads, totaling 1.2 miles, enter the WSA.

The WSA lies on the juniper-covered rugged canyon country of Juniper Mountain's northern slopes. Elevations range from 5,000 to 6,700 feet. The WSA consists predominantly of five broad, north-south ridgelines separated by the canyons of Squaw Creek and Hell's Creek and the smaller drainages of Scott Creek and Peach Creek. The canyons begin at the southern and eastern peripheries of the WSA and merge together in its center and north-central periphery. The drainages are typically steep, V-shaped canyons with numerous rock outcrops or rock formations, except in the lower reaches of Squaw Creek where 200-foot, sheer-walled rhyolite rock escarpments dominate the landscape. The entire WSA is blanketed with a dense juniper woodland. Open areas of sagebrush/grass are few and exist on the ridgeling areas of the WSA's periphery.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Owyhee Wilderness Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement filed in November 1986. Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: a no wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation of this report; and an all wilderness alternative.

2. Recommendation and Rationale

**0 acres recommended for
wilderness**

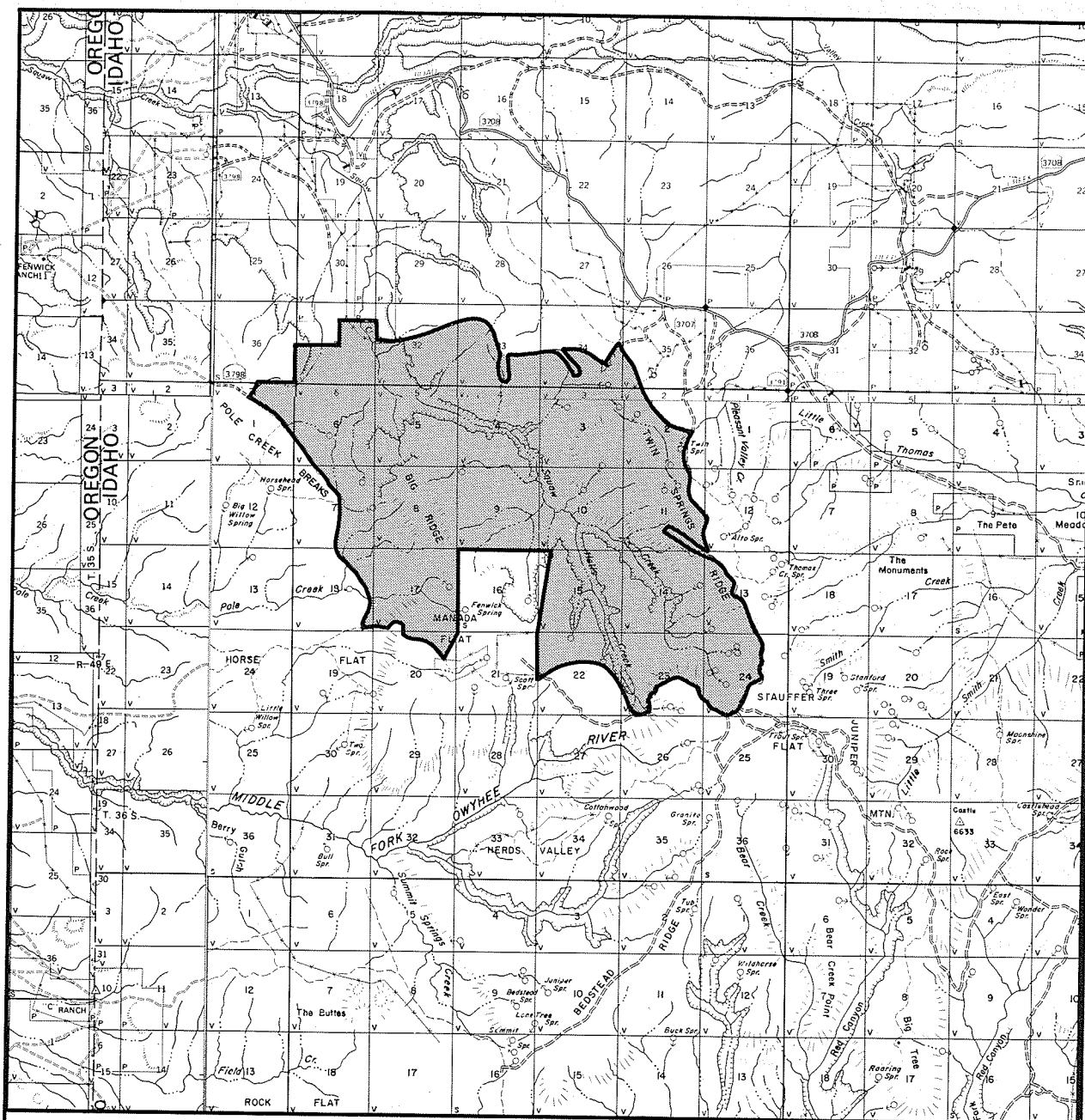
**10,780 acres recommended for
nonwilderness**

The recommendation for the Squaw Creek Canyon WSA is to not designate the area as wilderness and to release the 10,780 acres for other uses (see Squaw Creek Canyon Proposal map). The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative. It would cause the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The recommendation would use all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

The quality of the wilderness values was an additional consideration in the recommendation. While the WSA contained the wilderness values necessary for study, they are not considered to merit inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The WSA generally appears natural but there are several site-specific signs of man which impact naturalness locally. Solitude opportunities available in the WSA are similar to those afforded by thousands of acres of land adjacent to the WSA. These opportunities are due to the remoteness and lack of human activity in the area and are not due to any intrinsic values unique to the WSA. While the WSA does offer outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, there are no significant wildlife species or habitats, geologic features or scientific and educational values in the area that would benefit from wilderness designation.







In addition, wilderness designation would reduce the flexibility necessary to improve the ecological condition of plant communities through vegetative manipulation. Within the WSA, 3,800 acres would receive vegetation treatments, including tree cutting and/or prescribed burning, to control the encroachment of juniper into sagebrush-bunchgrass ecological sites. The amount of treatable land is relatively large and spread over much of the area. Therefore, conflicts with wilderness management cannot be mitigated by reasonable boundary adjustments.

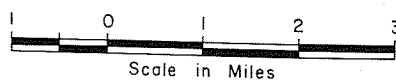
The long-term protection of multiple-use objectives in the WSA is dependent upon restoring good ecological condition to plant communities through vegetation manipulation. In the WSA, wilderness management objectives would not be compatible with the vegetation treatment objectives.



R. 6 W. | R. 5 W.

R. 5 W. | R. 4 W.

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|--------------|
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  | SPLIT ESTATE |
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS |  | STATE |
|  | LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  | PRIVATE |



ID-16-42
SQUAW CREEK CANYON
PROPOSAL

MAY 1988

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area
SQUAW CREEK CANYON WSA**

Within Wilderness Study Area

BLM (surface and subsurface)	10,780
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	0
Total	10,780

Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary

BLM (within WSA)	0
BLM (outside WSA)	0
Split Estate (within WSA)	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness	0
Inholdings (state, private)	0
State land (outside WSA)	0

Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness

BLM	10,780
Split Estate	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness	10,780
Inholdings (state, private)	0

3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

The Squaw Creek WSA consists of juniper-covered ridges separated by canyons. The area is extremely rugged and contains the 400-foot deep Squaw Creek canyon. The WSA is predominantly natural but there are several site-specific signs of man which impact the area locally including 1.5 miles of ways, 1.2 miles of a cherry-stem road, six miles of fence and five developed springs.

B. Solitude

The WSA's rugged canyon, hills, rock outcrops and juniper forests provide outstanding opportunities for solitude. However, the opportunities available in the WSA are similar to those afforded by thousands of acres of land adjacent to the WSA. These opportunities are due to the remoteness and lack of human activity in the area and are not due to any intrinsic values unique to the WSA.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The WSA's highly scenic natural features provide outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation for people interested in backpacking, hunting, fishing, sightseeing, photography and wildlife viewing. However, there are no significant wildlife habitats, geologic features or scientific and educational values in the area that would attract large number of visitors to the area.

D. Special Features

There are no special features in the Squaw Creek Canyon WSA.

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

A. Assessing the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of the Squaw Creek WSA would add a large expanse of climax juniper forest within the Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem not presently represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). This ecosystem is represented by three designated areas with 76,699 acres. There are 35 other BLM areas in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

TABLE 2
Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
			<u>NATIONWIDE</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	136	4,359,340
			<u>IDAHO</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
			<u>NEVADA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
			<u>CALIFORNIA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
			<u>OREGON</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074

**B. Expanding the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation
Within a Day's Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers**

The Squaw Creek Canyon WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

Table 3

**Wilderness Opportunities for Residents
of Major Population Centers**

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Boise, Idaho	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250

C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The Squaw Creek Canyon WSA would contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the NWPS. Regionally, the WSA would help to balance opportunities to attain diverse wilderness experiences.

Manageability

The WSA is manageable as wilderness because its topography, rocky soils and trees are barriers to vehicle access except along established roads and ways. These roads and ways can be closed.

Energy and Minerals Resource Values

An assessment of the mineral potential of the Squaw Creek Canyon WSA was done under the Geology, Energy and Mineral contract.

There are no mining claims or known energy or mineral resources in the WSA. No leasing for oil and gas exploration has occurred.

Impacts on Resources

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all the alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.

Table 4
Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative
WSA-16-42 (SQUAW CREEK CANYON)

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	10- to 20-year loss in naturalness, primitive recreation opportunities, solitude and scenic quality from 3,800 acres of juniper treatment and 3 miles of stabilization projects with recovery of values thereafter. Slight improvement in overall naturalness, primitive recreation opportunities and scenic quality from rangeland management actions. Solitude opportunities permanently lost from use of recreation access roads and campgrounds. There would be 25 annual user days of primitive recreation use through 2005.	Slight decline in primitive recreation opportunities and scenic quality from juniper encroachment. Naturalness unaffected. Slight improvement in solitude opportunities from road closures and land acquisition. Primitive recreation use would increase to 30 user days annually by 2005.
Impacts on Ecological Succession in Juniper Woodlands	Big sagebrush-grass communities restored on 3,800 acres treated. An improvement in condition class would occur on 25% of low sagebrush-grass sites and on climax juniper sites. On untreated seral juniper communities, there would be an initial improvement in vigor and density of grasses and forbs, but juniper encroachment would continue and ecological condition would eventually decline. 20-year ecological condition: <div style="display: flex; justify-content: flex-end;"> <div style="text-align: right;"> Poor 45% Fair 39% Good 15% Excellent 1% </div> </div>	Ecological condition would improve on climax juniper communities. On interspersed seral juniper communities, there would be an initial improvement in vigor and density of grasses and forbs, but juniper encroachment would continue and ecological condition would eventually decline. 20-year ecological condition: <div style="display: flex; justify-content: flex-end;"> <div style="text-align: right;"> Poor 56% Fair 35% Good 8% Excellent 1% </div> </div>
Impacts on Wildlife Populations Indigenous to Juniper Woodland Communities	Juniper treatment would enhance habitat and increase deer populations while increased access would reduce populations. There would be a net loss of 20-25 deer. Redband trout numbers would increase by 10%. Other wildlife would remain unchanged.	Juniper encroachment would reduce habitat and forage availability for mule deer while closure of roads would benefit deer. Net populations would remain unchanged. Trout numbers could be reduced by 10%. Other populations of wildlife would remain unchanged.
Impacts on Cultural Resources	New road building and a campground would increase public use thereby increasing vandalism and theft. Increased livestock use would increase trampling damage.	Wilderness designation would place constraints on study and management of cultural resources. Vehicle closures and decreases in livestock use would lessen damage to sites.
Impacts on Semi-Primitive Motorized Recreation Use	No road or way closures. The quality of hunting opportunities would improve slightly. Use would increase to 245 annual user days by 2005.	Closure of 1.2 miles of road and 1.5 miles of way. Impact not significant. Use would increase to 220 days by 2005.
Impacts on Soil Erosion	Over 20 years, impacts slightly beneficial. Average reduction in soil loss of .01-.07 tons/acre/year on nontreated areas and .05-.15 tons/acre/year on treated areas.	Over 20 years, impacts slightly beneficial. Average reduction in soil loss of .05-.10 tons/acre/year.

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Operations and Facilities (Squaw Creek Canyon WSA)	Unrestricted vehicle use. Livestock use increased to 885 AUMs in 20 years. 1 new spring would enhance grazing system.	Vehicle restrictions would hinder facility maintenance and livestock management activities. No new facility construction would limit grazing system effectiveness. Livestock use would decrease to 795 AUMs.
Impact on Total Annual Revenues	Revenues would be increased by approximately \$11,995.	Revenues would be reduced by approximately \$10,000.

Local Social and Economic Considerations

Release of the entire Squaw Creek Canyon WSA for nonwilderness uses would cause no significant local social and economic impacts.

Summary of WSA - Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Certain comments received during the inventory process and early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and various alternatives for the ultimate management of those lands found to have wilderness values.

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, 98 comments were received. Of those, 72 were written and 26 were oral statements received at public hearings. Fourteen commenters supported wilderness designation for all or part of the WSA and ten were for wilderness designation in general. Seventeen commenters supported no wilderness for the WSA and nine were against wilderness designation in general. The remaining commenters took no position regarding the Squaw Creek Canyon WSA. Those supporting wilderness stated that designation is needed to protect wilderness values and special features.

Those opposing designation were concerned that:

- Federal lands should be managed for multiple uses, not wilderness.
- There is no need to preserve sagebrush steppe wilderness.
- Wilderness would prohibit vegetation control and intensive grazing systems.
- Wilderness would limit access and prevent exploration for minerals.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs, Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Service, Federal Aviation Agency, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho Air National Guard and the Owyhee County Commissioners commented on the Draft EIS. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game opposed wilderness designation because the land managers need flexibility to manipulate vegetative composition to improve the habitat base for wildlife and livestock. The Idaho Air National Guard stated that wilderness designation would conflict with its tactical flight training mission. The Owyhee County Commissioners opposed wilderness designation. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, Environmental Protection Agency and Federal Aviation Agency expressed no alternative preference.